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Triosyn blossoms to double staff

By Dan McLean, Free Press Staff Writer

WILLISTON -- Nurtured by millions of dollars in federal funds, which were secured by Vermont's senior senator, Triosyn has realized tremendous growth, blossoming from just eight employees in July to 80 this week. The burgeoning anti-microbial respirator-mask manufacturer is now looking to double in size yet again.

Triosyn, which is also developing an anti-microbial wound dressing for the military, is a beneficiary of good timing. The health concerns surrounding the H1N1 pandemic, commonly known as swine flu, have created increased demand for the company's respirator masks. To keep up, the company plans to hire 75 people in early January, and that may not be the last round of hiring.

The Williston facility is cranking out respirator masks six days a week, three shifts a day. "We can't make them fast enough," said Joe Tanelli, senior director of engineering at Safe Life Corp., the San Diego-based-parent company of Triosyn.

This year, Triosyn has the capacity to produce roughly 2 million masks. New equipment will ramp that up to 50 million respirators for next year, said Tanelli, who works at the Williston site. That growth will require the company to move, he said -- but the company will remain in Vermont and hopes to find a larger Williston location.

"Take a look at the sign on the way out: 'We're hiring,'" Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., said during a news conference at the Williston facility Monday. "I wish every company in Vermont could have a sign like that."

Since 2002, Leahy has helped funnel \$15 million to Triosyn to develop the technology that is now being used in the medical masks. The material previously had a military purpose: gas mask filters used by the U.S. military during 2002 and 2003, Tanelli said. About 75 percent of the company's revenues come from products sold for civilian use.

During Leahy's visit at Triosyn on Monday, he announced \$800,000 in additional funding to develop a wound dressing for U.S. troops that will significantly reduce infections.

Leahy has helped drive defense funding to a number of Vermont companies, including General Dynamics in Burlington, Revision Eyewear in Essex Junction, and MicroStrain in Williston. Before stopping to tour Triosyn on Monday, Leahy announced a \$2.4 million Department of Defense contract for MicroStrain for the development of independently powered wireless sensors to help the Navy monitor wear and tear on helicopters. Since 2006, Leahy has garnered \$8.1 million in contracts for MicroStrain.

"It's military procurement that gets it started... but virtually everything we have talked about has a civilian use," Leahy said. "Everything here has a dual use and, again, as a Vermonter, I'm just proud it's being done here."

"We could never be what we are today without you," Pierre Jean Messier, vice chairman and chief scientific officer of Safe Life, told Leahy during the news conference Monday. Messier was the founder and CEO of Triosyn Corp., which was absorbed by Safe Life Corp. in 2006, four years after Triosyn moved its headquarters from Canada to Vermont.

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